



Centre for Professional Practice

## Guidance around Section 47 Enquiries

### Initiating Section 47 Enquiries

A section 47 enquiry is carried out by undertaking or continuing with an assessment in accordance with the guidance set out in this chapter and following the principles and parameters of a good assessment.

Local authority social workers should lead assessments under section 47 of the Children Act 1989. The police, health practitioners, teachers and school staff and other relevant practitioners should help the local authority in undertaking its enquiries.

### Purpose

A section 47 enquiry is initiated to decide whether and what type of action is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is suspected of or likely to be suffering significant harm.

### Social Workers should:

- lead the assessment in accordance with this guidance
- carry out enquiries in a way that minimises distress for the child and family
- see the child who is the subject of concern to ascertain their wishes and feelings; assess their understanding of their situation; assess their relationships and circumstances more broadly
- interview parents/carers and determine the wider social and environmental factors that might impact on them and their child
- systematically gather information about the child's and family's history

- analyse the findings of the assessment and evidence about what interventions are likely to be most effective with other relevant practitioners.
- determine the child's needs and the level of risk of harm faced by the child to inform what help should be provided and act to provide that help
- follow the guidance set out in 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures', where a decision has been made to undertake a joint interview of the child as part of any criminal investigation

### **The Police should:**

- help other organisations and agencies understand the reasons for concerns about the child's safety and welfare
- decide whether or not police investigations reveal grounds for instigating criminal proceedings
- make available to other practitioners any evidence gathered to inform discussions about the child's welfare
- follow the guidance set out in 'Achieving Best Evidence in Criminal Proceedings: Guidance' on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures, where a decision has been made to undertake a joint interview of the child as part of the criminal investigations

### **Health Professionals should:**

- provide any of a range of specialist assessments. For example, paediatric or forensic medical assessments, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and/or child psychologists may be involved in specific assessments relating to the child's developmental progress. The lead health practitioner (probably a consultant

paediatrician, or possibly the child's GP) may need to request and co-ordinate these assessments

- ensure appropriate treatment and follow up health concerns, such as administration of missing vaccines

#### **All involved Practitioners should:**

- contribute to the assessment as required, providing information about the child and family
- consider whether a joint enquiry/investigation team may need to speak to a child victim without the knowledge of the parent/carers
- seek advice and guidance as required and in line with local practice guidance

#### **Outcome of Section 47 enquiries**

Local authority social workers are responsible for deciding what action to take and how to proceed following section 47 enquiries.

If local authority children's social care decides not to proceed with a child protection conference then other practitioners involved with the child and family have the right to request that local authority children's social care convene a conference if they have serious concerns that a child's welfare may not be adequately safeguarded. As a last resort, the safeguarding partners should have in place a quick and straightforward means of resolving differences of opinion.

#### **Where Concerns of Significant Harm are Not Substantiated**

##### **Social Workers should:**

- discuss the case with the child, parents and other practitioners

- determine whether support from any services may be helpful and help secure it
- consider whether the child's health and development should be re-assessed regularly against specific objectives and decide who has responsibility for doing this

#### **All involved practitioners should:**

- participate in further discussions as necessary
- contribute to the development of any plan as appropriate
- provide services as specified in the plan for the child
- review the impact of services delivered as agreed in the plan
- seek advice and guidance as required and in line with local practice guidance

#### **Where concerns of significant harm are substantiated and the child is judged to be suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm:**

##### **Social workers should:**

- convene an initial child protection conference (see next section for details). The timing of this conference should depend on the urgency of the case and respond to the needs of the child and the nature and severity of the harm they may be facing. The initial child protection conference should take place within 15 working days of a strategy discussion, or the strategy discussion at which section 47 enquiries were initiated if more than one has been held
- consider whether any practitioners with specialist knowledge should be invited to participate
- ensure that the child and their parents understand the purpose of the conference and who will attend

- help prepare the child if they are attending or making representations through a third party to the conference. Give information about advocacy agencies and explain that the family may bring an advocate, friend or supporter

**All involved practitioners should:**

- contribute to the information their agency provides ahead of the conference, setting out the nature of the organisation's or agency's involvement with the child and family
- consider, in conjunction with the police and the appointed conference Chair, whether the report can and should be shared with the parents and if so when
- attend the conference and take part in decision making when invited
- seek advice and guidance as required and in line with local practice guidance

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